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The years pass, indistinguishable one from another except when famine or other calamity makes a landmark on which the memory will fasten in the years to come. Ten years ago many of the older men dated their birth according to whether they were born before or after "Seventy-two", the Bengali year 1272, when a disastrous famine broke up many families. Another memorable year was the year of the influenza epidemic that followed the close of the 1914–18 war, and young people today can calculate their age in relation to the year of the *malot*, or epidemic. The division of the year into months is somewhat vague, for whereas the only names for the months now current are the twelve months of the Bengali calendar, the Santal reckoning is based on the moon. As one man remarked: "We sometimes have to slip a month." In 1939, when this statement was made, there was confusion in the Santal calendar between *Bhador* (the Bengali month extending through a part of August and September) and *San*, the month that precedes it. Names are given to the phases of the moon according to its shape. Thus I was told: "The *Ende* (the Ind festival which in West Bengal is associated with Dharma worship) is observed during the month of *Bhador*, when the moon is shaped like an open umbrella."

The days of the week also have Bengali names, and the day is divided into periods, the names of which relate in some cases to the meals taken, in other cases to the duties which have to be performed or to a more general association of the time. When Santals wish to make an appointment at a particular time it is sufficient to point to the position in the sky where the sun will have climbed. Some time before dawn it is "little cockcrow", and this is followed by "cockcrow". *Basiam*, the time when breakfast is taken, is divided into three parts: "child *basiam*", "*basiam*" and "bent *basiam*". The word *basiam*, meaning "leftover", is a reminder that the breakfast consists of a small quantity of cold rice or rice gruel, cooked with the evening meal on the previous day and kept for the morning, when it is eaten with a little salt. The late afternoon is called the "time when women draw water". One way of describing a short period is to relate it to the time taken in boiling a pot of rice. Work is continued until the shadow of a house or a tree falls across a particular spot. It happens frequently that children draw a line outside their schoolhouse, so that when the shadow of the building falls across the line they know it is time to go home. A man who was in the habit of sleeping in

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his courtyard after the midday meal used to make sure of rising at the right time by telling his children to waken him when the shadows had reached a certain spot.

During the night the time is indicated not only by the position of the moon but also by the stars, and particularly by reference to the constellation Pleiades. There are at least two myths relating to the sun and the moon. In the one the sun is male and the moon female, while the stars are their children. The absence of the stars from the sky in daytime is explained by a story that they made a pact to eat their children. The sun carried out the bargain and so there are no stars visible by daylight, but the moon evaded her promise and so some of the children survived. The other version says that both the sun and the moon are male; they became related to each other by marrying each other's sisters. Only a few of the stars and constellations are named. The Pleiades have the same name as one of the clans; the Milky Way is known as the "cow track", and the Great Bear is the "old woman's bed".

Between the harvest and the Spring festival, a period which corresponds with the cold weather, the villages present a deserted appearance, due to the annual migration to the east for work in the harvest fields of the Ganges delta. This seasonal migration, dictated by economic necessity, plays an important part in the life of the area. Farther to the north many Santals work in the coal-mines round Asansol, while to the south labour is drawn to the great steel town of Tatanagar. In this area migration to industrial centres is rare; the Santals regard the conditions in industrial towns as highly dangerous to health, and they affirm that nothing will induce them to go there. The same reason, however, does not prevent them from leaving their own villages in a non-malarious tract of country for the malarious rice-growing areas farther east, in consequence of which the money earned is often more than spent in the expenses of protracted illness and long periods of idleness. Each village organizes its own party of migrants, who go to work for the same masters year after year. The wages they receive are more than double what is paid in their own locality, and so they earn the money required to pay rent, to meet social expenditure for marriages, and to pay off old debts. The homes are left in charge of the aged, and some of the children are left behind. The villages are denuded of able-bodied men and women, apart from a few who do not need to go. Family parties travel together, babies and very young children being carried

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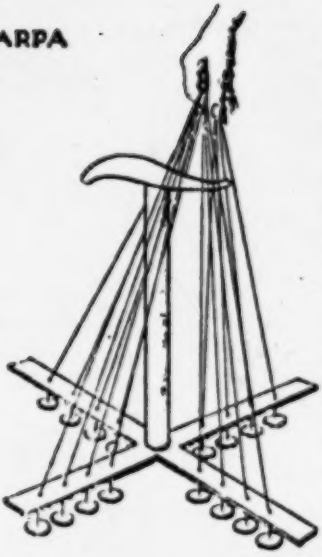
SARPA



dances are preceded and ended by the shouting of obscene words. The Spring and the Harvest festivals possess their own cycle of songs and dances. During the latter the women make use of a musical instrument known as the *sarpa*, which is brought out only at this time. It is a percussion instrument that consists of a vertical pole about fifteen inches high fixed into two crossed horizontal pieces of wood. Holes are bored in the foot-long horizontal pieces, and through these holes pass lengths of string to the end of which are attached small circular wooden clappers. With the handle at the top of the vertical pole in the left hand and the upper end of the strings held in the right hand, the clappers can be drawn up sharply against the wooden bars, so producing a ringing sound. The workmanship of the *sarpas* varies; some are plain, while others display a handle carved in the shape of a dove and geometrical designs on the horizontal bars. The dancers form two lines; the older women form a line in front and sing and dance with their arms linked. Behind them comes a line of younger women, some of them beating the *sarpas*, some with small brass cymbals, while the two women at the ends of the line wave the end of their *saris* to fan the others.

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The *buaṅ*[1] is a musical instrument associated particularly with the month that precedes that in which the Harvest festival is celebrated. This is the month known as *Dàsàĕ*, from the Hindi word *dasserah*. The *buaṅ* belongs to a type of musical instrument with a wide distribution in different parts of the world. Its prototype existed when men first plucked the strings of their bows in order to hear a pleasing sound. To the arc of the bow a large hollow gourd is attached, and this adds resonance to the sound of the plucked bow string. The gourd is

[1] See illustration opposite.